

What You Need to Know About

Web 2.0

BY CATHERINE IMPERATORE

Web 2.0 is a term that is heard in the media, in the boardroom and increasingly in schools.

But what is it, and is it more than a buzzword? Also known as the read/write or participatory Web, Web 2.0 includes such tools as blogs, podcasts, forums, wikis and social networks. It gives users the ability to take in information and create, organize and connect with others interested in the same topics. Web 2.0 is revolutionizing education because students and educators can easily and cost-effectively receive and create information and interact with each other.

In its first chapter, the Web featured one-way communication of information, from company, expert or media outlet to user. In Web 2.0, people can take control of information, rating and responding to what they like and don't like and sharing their favorite resources through social bookmarking services such

as del.icio.us and Digg. Internet users can communicate with each other on forums and discussion boards, general social networks such as MySpace and Facebook, and smaller social networks that bring together those interested in a particular topic. People can easily create information by sharing their thoughts, experiences and expertise on blogs (online journals on which others can comment), wikis (easy-to-edit Web sites that users can modify or add to) and podcasts (radio shows broadcast on the Internet). The ability to create and organize information in addition to passively receiving it is why Web 2.0 is sometimes called the read/write or participatory Web. Increasingly, many of these activities can be carried out on a mobile phone, releasing Internet users from their desks.



RSS

Web 2.0 allows users to pull to themselves only the information that interests them instead of receiving what is pushed out by media outlets and other traditional content producers. This is useful as the amount of information grows exponentially owing to the relative ease and low cost of creating online resources. The tool that enables this pulling of information is called RSS. Sometimes translated as Really Simple Syndication, Wikipedia describes RSS as “a family of Web feed formats used to publish frequently updated content.” First, the user subscribes to a Web site, blog, podcast or other online resource that interests them. When that resource is updated, the new content appears in the user’s RSS feed reader or aggregator. With search engines such as Google, the user can also search for a topic of interest and subscribe to that search. When new content is published on that topic, the user receives it in his or her aggregator. The RSS aggregator, which is usually free, can be a program you download to your computer or a Web-based application that you sign into with a username and password. Common aggregators include Google Reader, Bloglines, Netvibes and Rojo while a major aggregator specifically for podcasts is iTunes.

Applications for Education Professionals

Educators, administrators and guidance counselors are turning to Web 2.0 to learn more about these educational technology tools and to quickly and easily share resources with colleagues. By subscribing to education blogs, Web sites, wikis and podcasts through RSS, education professionals can keep on top of the daily flow of information. And they can become more active online participants by creating their own blogs, wikis and podcasts; joining education social networks; and sharing information on education forums and discussion boards. “It’s become more important than ever for teachers to actually practice lifelong learning. And one way of doing that is to stay connected to the community of practitioners, of experts, in order to get the latest information, the latest techniques,” notes David Warlick, a 30-year educator and an author, consultant and public speaker on 21st century teaching and learning. (ACTE recently spoke with Warlick during a Career Tech Talk podcast. You can listen to it at <http://careertechtalk.podbean.com>.)

Applications in the classroom

Web 2.0 is useful in the classroom because it is an easy and inexpensive

way for students to learn, create and share with each other and their teachers; Web 2.0 tools can create conversations. For instance, an educator can post an assignment, a piece of writing or a scenario on a classroom blog and students can respond in the comments section. Students can also post their own writings, images, and audio and video clips on a classroom blog for evaluation by fellow students, becoming more involved with and excited about assignments because they are submitting



Blog: (bläg) n. Online journals on which others can comment.

Podcast: (päd-kast) n. Radio shows that broadcast on the Internet.

RSS: abbr. Updates that appear in a subscriber's application or aggregator.

Wiki: (wi-kē) n. Easy-to-edit Web sites that users can modify or add to.

them for the eyes of the entire class, not just the teacher.

Blogs are not the only online services suitable for use in the classroom. Warlick gives the example of a computer science class that collaborates to write the course textbook on a wiki. By creating podcasts in place of writing reports, students can share with each other and their teachers and learn audio recording techniques and presentation skills. A common postsecondary application of Web 2.0 tools is when professors record and podcast their lectures so that students can access the information at any time. Also, virtual worlds built for children to learn through science and math games, and career exploration, can have an increasing presence in the classroom.

Even social networks, often the pariah of education technology, can offer a place for classroom conversation, especially if the community is restricted to educators and students.

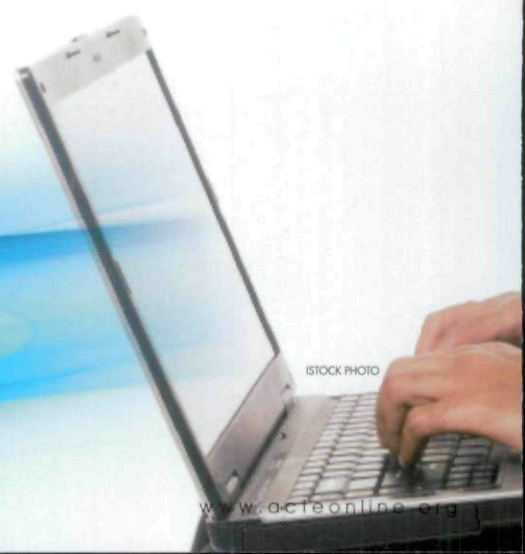
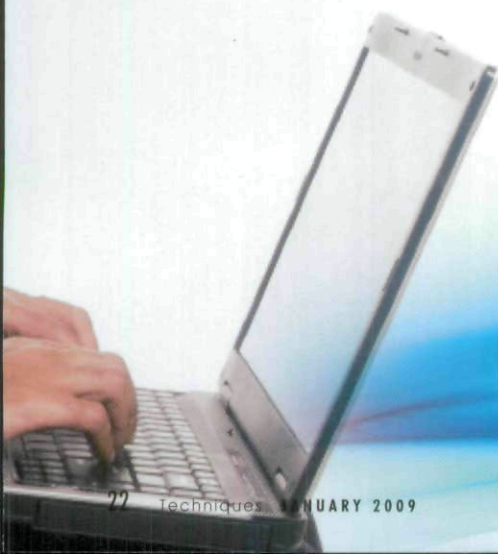
Digital Literacy and Safety

The Internet is more than a tool that educators can use to engage students—students must learn to use the Web wisely for their own safety and success. Doug Johnson in a 2005 article for *EdTech* magazine notes that students are going to seek out or stumble upon inappropriate Web sites; educators should use these opportunities to guide and instruct. He recommends resisting the urge to overreact, “Technology-use behaviors should be treated no differently than other behaviors—good

or bad—and the consequences of student behaviors should be the same.” Students must also be taught how to evaluate Internet information sources; this digital literacy is important as lifelong learning increasingly occurs on the Internet.

Accessing Online Resources at School

What can you do when a Web site, blog, wiki or podcast you want to access is blocked on your school's computers? According to the FCC, the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) requires that schools and libraries receiving funding support from the E-Rate program for Internet access or internal connections verify that they have Internet safety policies and technology protection measures, including the blocking of sites that are defined as obscene, child pornography or harmful to minors. In an effort to protect students, however, some schools and districts prevent access to online resources that could have value to students and education professionals. CIPA does allow Web sites to be unblocked by authorized individuals for legitimate reasons, so determine if your school or district IT department or IT oversight committee has a review process for unblocking online resources. For instance, the school district Web site for South Burlington, Vermont, includes a review process in which the staff member making the request e-mails the technology committee with the Web site address and



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a brief explanation of why the site should be unblocked. Within a few hours, the staff member will be notified whether the request has been temporarily approved or rejected; a review committee will then determine if the site will be permanently unblocked. Remember, you won't know if a Web site can be unblocked until you ask. **1**

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Online Resources for Education Professionals:

www.classroom20.com—a social network for educators interested in Web 2.0 in education.
<http://davidwarlick.com/2cents>—David Warlick's education technology blog.

Online Resources for the Classroom:

www.ePals.com—a community of classrooms, this service also offers safe e-mail and blogging.
www.wikispaces.com/site/for/teachers100K—a wiki service currently offering free wikis to K-12 educators.

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